



No. 98 Rs. 3.50

PUNDALIK

AND SAKHU



TWO FAMOUS SAINTS OF MAHARASHTRA

Prabhakar
Khanolkar

Twice a year on the Ekadashis of the months of Ashadh (around August) and Kartik (around April), pilgrims from far and near come to Pandharpur, a famous pilgrim centre in Maharashtra, known for its Vithoba temple. These pilgrims are called 'Varkaris' and their pilgrimage—a 'Vari'.

The deity of the temple, Vithoba, also called Vithal or *Panduranga* by his devotees at Pandharpur, is none other than Shri Vishnu or Krishna.

Pundalik was the man who caused Sri Vishnu to stay at Pandharpur. People are so grateful to Pundalik that they visit his Samadhi (which is about a furlong away from the temple), before they seek the blessings of Vithal.

Saint Sakhu was a great devotee of Panduranga and is a well-known saint of Maharashtra.

It is believed that she was staying in Karhad near the confluence of the rivers, Krishna and Koyna, where stands to this day a built-up embankment named after her.. She probably lived during the time of the first Peshwa of the Marathas.

Her silent suffering and her unflinching devotion for Panduranga have endeared her to every Maharashtra.

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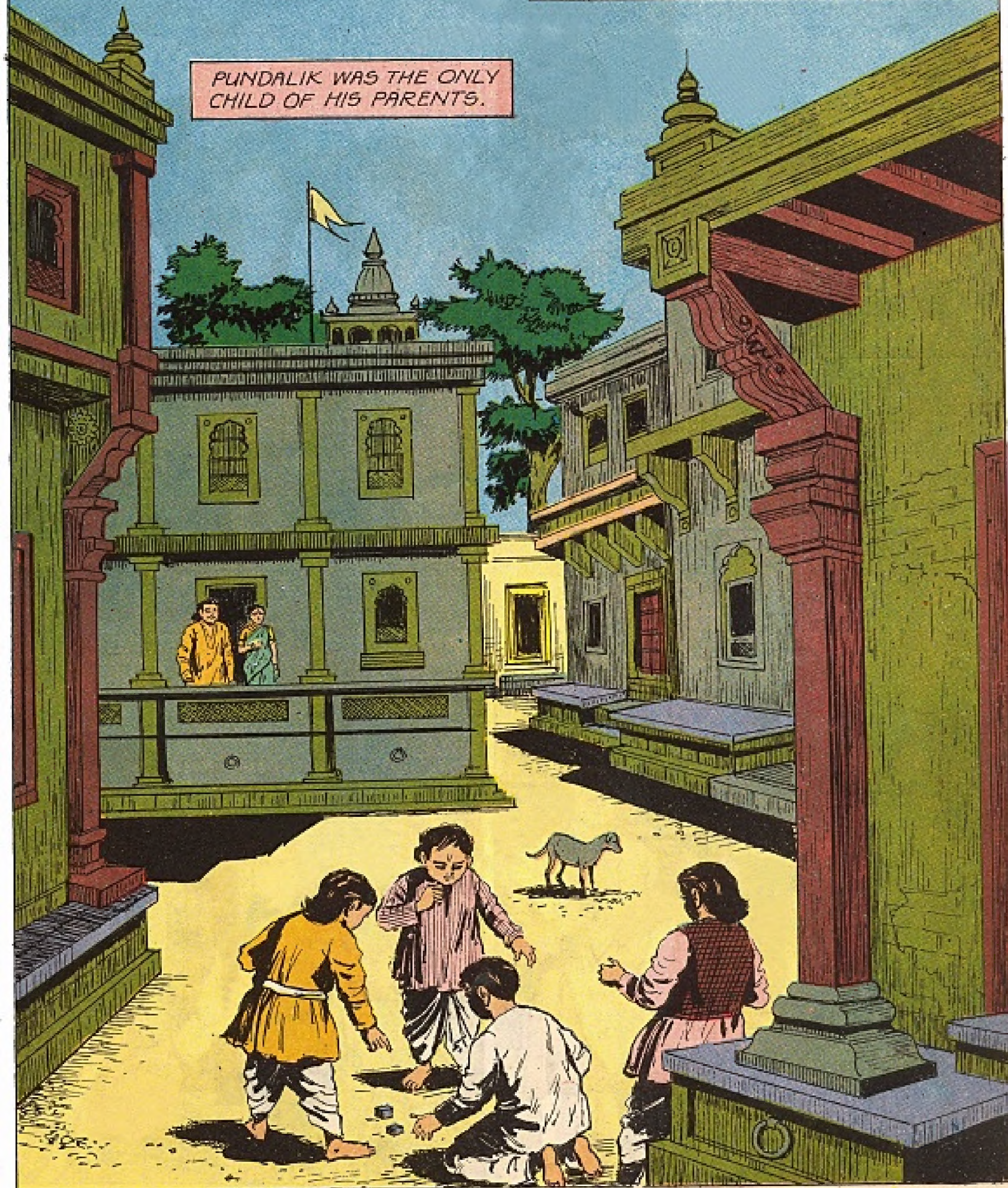
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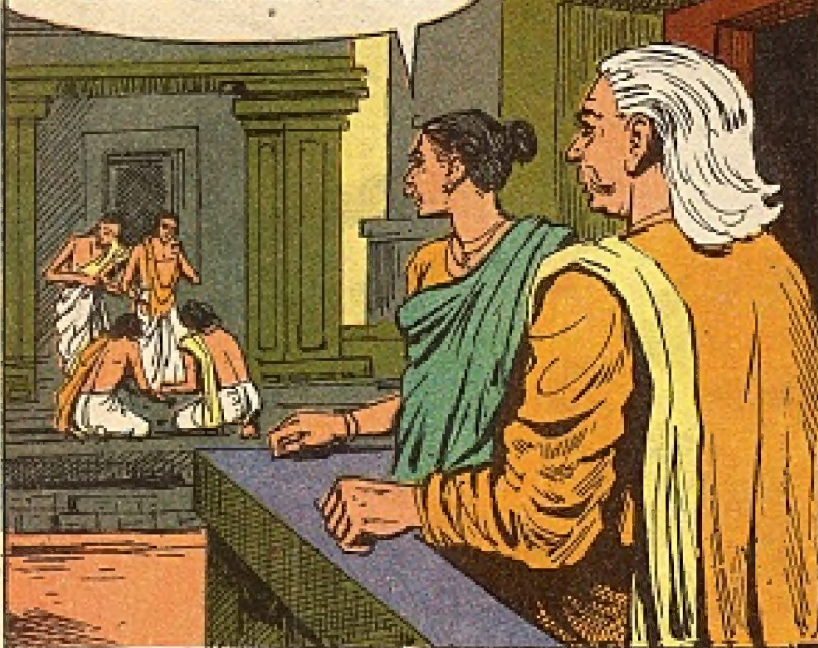
PUNDALIK

PUNDALIK WAS THE ONLY
CHILD OF HIS PARENTS.



HE WAS BROUGHT UP WITH GREAT LOVE AND AFFECTION. BUT AS HE GREW OLDER, HE FELL INTO BAD COMPANY.

ALAS, WE BELIEVED THAT OUR SON WOULD TAKE CARE OF US IN OUR OLD AGE: BUT HE DOESN'T EVEN SPEAK POLITELY TO US.



HE SPENT ALL HIS TIME GAMBLING.

OH NO! I'VE LOST AGAIN! I DON'T HAVE ANY MONEY WITH ME NOW.

I'LL LEND YOU SOME.



HE WAS FOND OF HIS WORTHLESS FRIENDS.

LET'S BE MERRY. LIFE IS FULL OF FUN.

YES, MY FRIEND. LIVE FOR TODAY. WHY THINK OF TOMORROW?



HE WAS HEARTLESS AND MEAN TO THOSE AT HOME.

PUNDALIK, YOU HAVE SPENT ALL THE MONEY THAT WE HAD. PLEASE COME TO YOUR SENSES, MY SON.

DON'T YOU DARE TELL ME WHAT TO DO! IF YOU DON'T HAVE MONEY, GIVE ME YOUR GOLD!



WITH ALL THEIR WEALTH GONE, HIS POOR MOTHER HAD TO RESORT TO BEGGING.

PLEASE LEND ME A LITTLE RICE. I WILL RETURN IT TO YOU AS SOON AS I CAN.

TAYI,* TAKE THIS RICE. I AM GLAD TO HELP YOU.

POOR LADY, HOW SHE MUST SUFFER.

THAT GOOD-FOR-NOTHING SON IS MAKING LIFE MISERABLE FOR THEM.

I CANNOT LIVE SUCH A LIFE ANY LONGER. IT IS BETTER TO DIE THAN TO HAVE TO BEG FOR A LIVING.

YES, MY DEAR. WHAT YOU SAY IS TRUE. MY PATIENCE TOO IS AT AN END. PUNDALIK WILL NEVER REFORM. WE WILL GO AWAY ON A PILGRIMAGE TO KASHI.

SO, THE NEXT DAY, WHEN PUNDALIK WAS AWAY WITH HIS FRIENDS—

MOTHER, LET ME COME WITH YOU.

NO, MY CHILD. YOUR PLACE IS BY YOUR HUSBAND. SERVE HIM WELL. MAY GOD BLESS YOU.

A LITTLE LATER, PUNDALIK RETURNED HOME.

WHERE IS MOTHER?

THEY HAVE
GONE ON A
PILGRIMAGE
TO KASHI.

WELL, LET THEM
GO. I AM HUNGRY.
GIVE ME SOME-
THING TO EAT.

THERE IS NOT A
SINGLE MORSEL
OF FOOD IN
THE HOUSE.

THEN GO AND
BORROW SOME
FROM THE
NEIGHBOURS.

I TRIED, BUT THEY
REFUSE. THEY
LOVED YOUR
PARENTS. NOW THAT
THEY ARE GONE,
NOBODY WANTS TO
HELP US.

PUNDALIK WAS NOT IN THE LEAST PERTURBED. HE WENT TO THE MONEYLENDER. BUT—

BEGONE. I SHALL NO
LONGER LEND YOU
ANY MONEY. YOUR
PARENTS HAVE LEFT.
WHO WILL REPAY
THE LOANS?

EVEN HIS FRIENDS AVOIDED HIM,
NOW THAT HE HAD NO MONEY.

I AM SORRY,
PUNDALIK, I MYSELF
AM IN NEED
OF MONEY.

WE'D BETTER
GO AWAY BEFORE
HE ASKS US!

AT LAST, PUNDALIK REALISED THE TRUTH.

WHAT HAVE I DONE! MY PARENTS
WERE THE ONLY ONES WHO
REALLY CARED FOR
ME. AND I HAVE
DRIVEN THEM
AWAY!

I AM A SINNER.
I BROUGHT NOTHING
BUT MISERY TO
MY PARENTS.
WILL GOD EVER
FORGIVE ME?

I TOO WILL GO TO KASHI
AND PURIFY MYSELF
IN THE SACRED GANGA.
THEN I WILL REFORM
MYSELF. I WILL
STOP GAMBLING
AND START
WORKING.

THE NEXT DAY, PUNDALIK LEFT FOR KASHI WITH HIS WIFE.



THEY HAD TO CROSS A DENSE FOREST.



I AM TIRED AND HUNGRY. I CANNOT WALK ANY FURTHER.



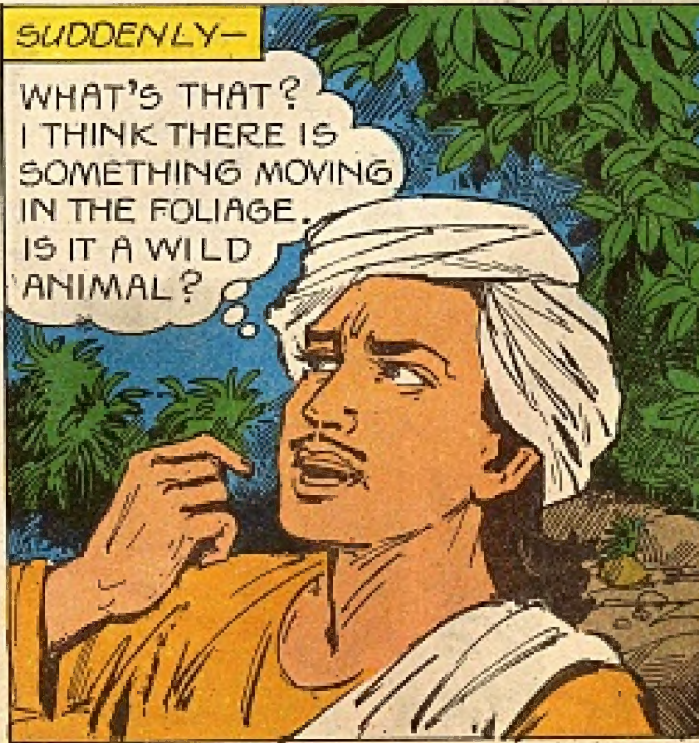
LET US REST HERE TONIGHT. I WILL GO AND BRING YOU SOME FRUITS AND BERRIES.

AFTER HAVING EATEN THE FRUITS AND BERRIES, PUNDALIK'S WIFE DROPPED OFF TO SLEEP, WHILE HE KEPT GUARD.



SUDDENLY—

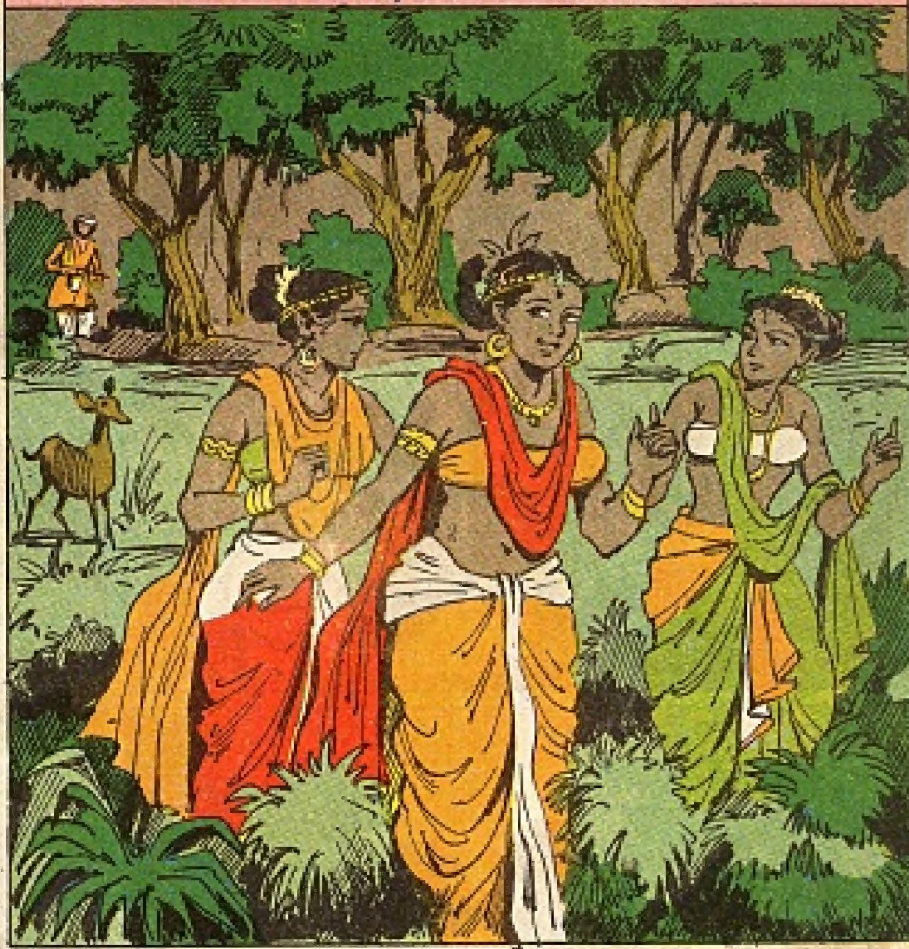
WHAT'S THAT? I THINK THERE IS SOMETHING MOVING IN THE FOLIAGE. IS IT A WILD ANIMAL?



PUNDALIK GOT UP
TO INVESTIGATE.



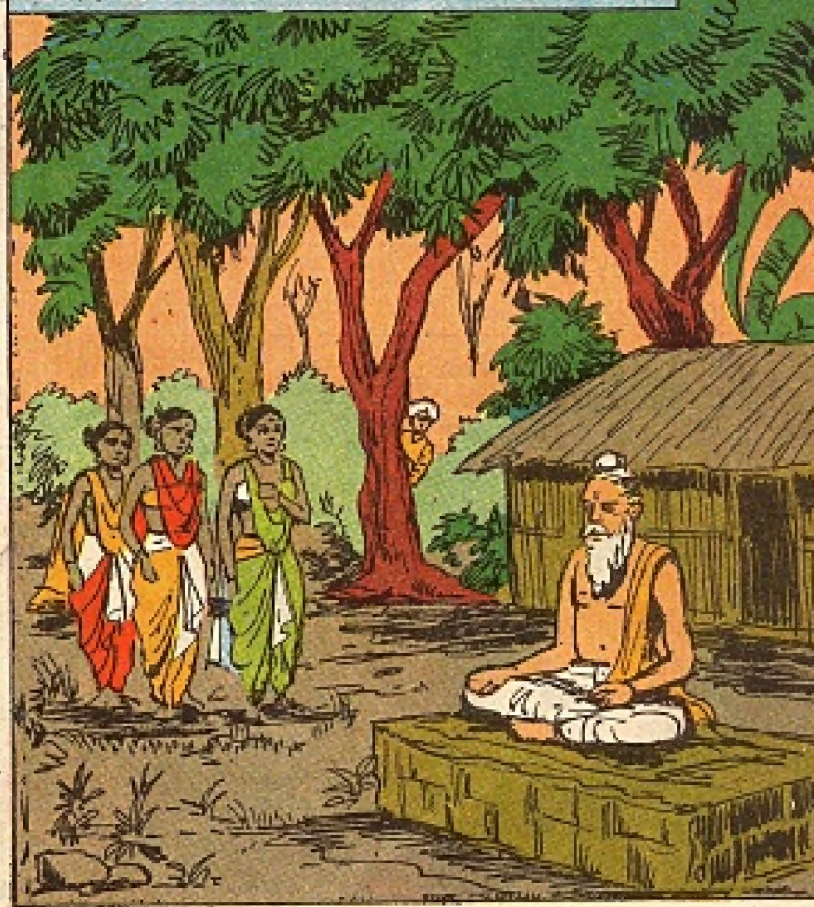
THE SOUND HAD BEEN MADE BY THREE DARK
LADIES MOVING THROUGH THE BUSHES.



PUNDALIK FOLLOWED THEM...



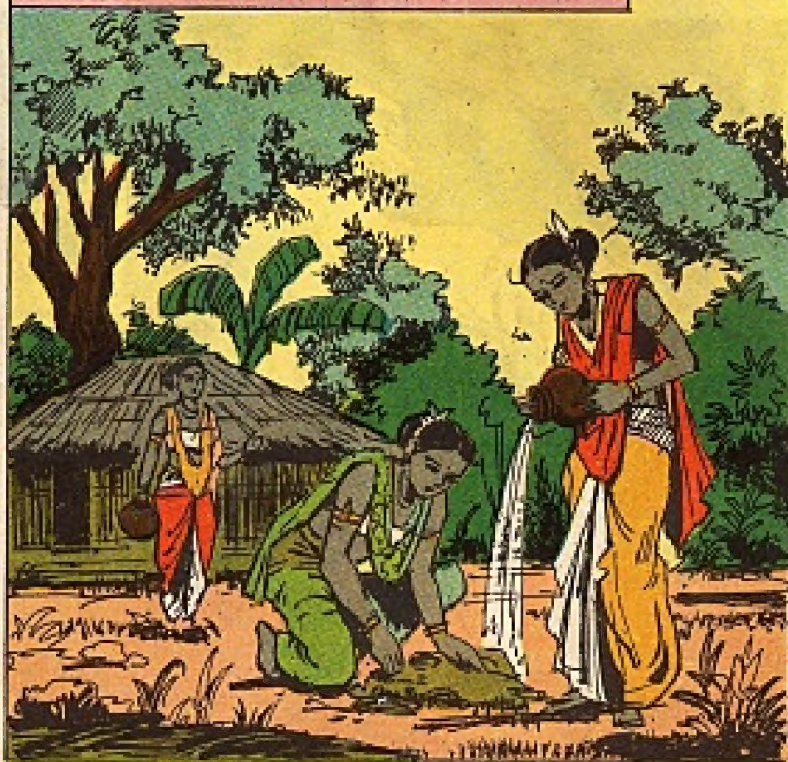
...TILL THEY STEPPED INTO A
LITTLE CLEARING, WHERE SAGE
KUKKUT SAT DEEP IN MEDITATION.



PUNDALIK HID BEHIND A BUSH
AND WATCHED WHILE THEY
SWEEPED THE COURTYARD CLEAN.



THEN THEY SPRINKLED SOME
WATER ON THE GROUND...



...AND SPREAD COWDUNG ON IT.



AS THEY DID SO, A DRASTIC CHANGE
CAME
OVER
THEM.



AND LO! THEY TURNED INTO LADIES,
GLOWING WITH A UNIQUE RADIANCE.



THERE WAS A LOOK OF DISBELIEF IN PUNDALIK'S EYES, AS HE STOOD GAZING AT THE THREE FIGURES.



WHEN, HAVING FINISHED THEIR WORK, THE LADIES BEGAN TO RETRACE THEIR STEPS -

THEY MUST BE GODDESSES WHO HAVE DESCENDED FROM THE HEAVENS. I MUST SPEAK TO THEM.



SO, AS THEY CAME NEARER, PUNDALIK STEPPED FORWARD.

SHOO - GO AWAY! DON'T STAND IN OUR WAY! YOU ARE ONE OF THE WORST SINNERS IN THE WORLD.



PLEASE HAVE MERCY
ON ME. I KNOW I HAVE
SINNED. I AM REPENTANT.
PLEASE TELL ME
WHO YOU ARE.

I AM RIVER
GANGA.

I AM RIVER
YAMUNA.

I AM RIVER
SARASWATI.



PUNDALIK KNELT BEFORE THEM.

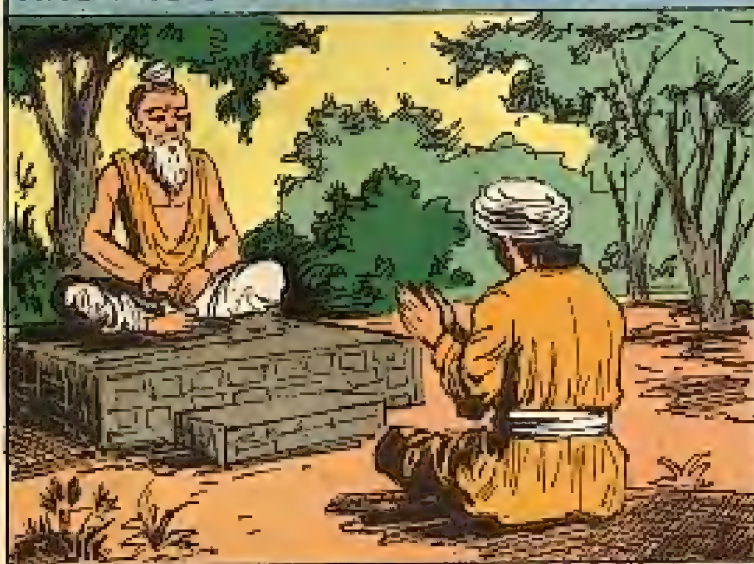
EVERY DAY COUNTLESS
PILGRIMS COME AND
BATHE IN OUR WATERS
AND WE BECOME DARK
WITH THEIR SINS.

EVERY NIGHT WE
COME HERE TO
PURIFY OURSELVES.

IF YOU REALLY WISH
TO REFORM, SEEK
THE BLESSINGS OF
SAGE KUKKUT. HE
WILL GUIDE YOU.



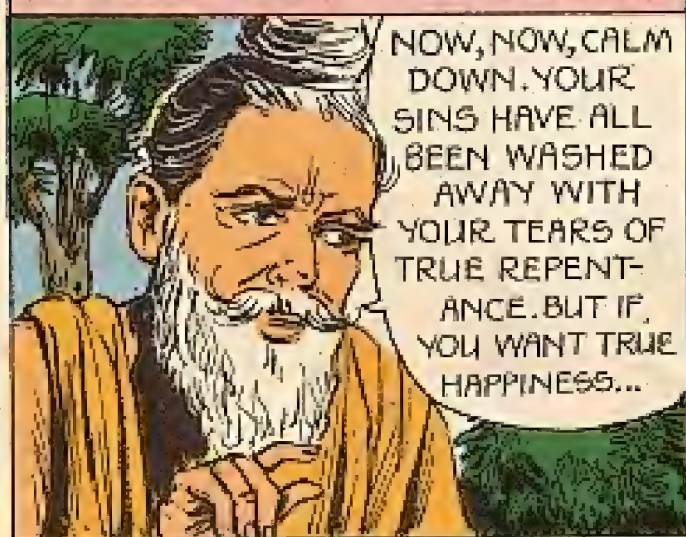
AFTER THEY LEFT, PUNDALIK WENT AND SAT PATIENTLY IN FRONT OF THE SAGE WHO WAS STILL DEEP IN MEDITATION.



AS THE FIRST RAYS OF DAWN BRIGHTENED THE SKY, KUKKUT OPENED HIS EYES.



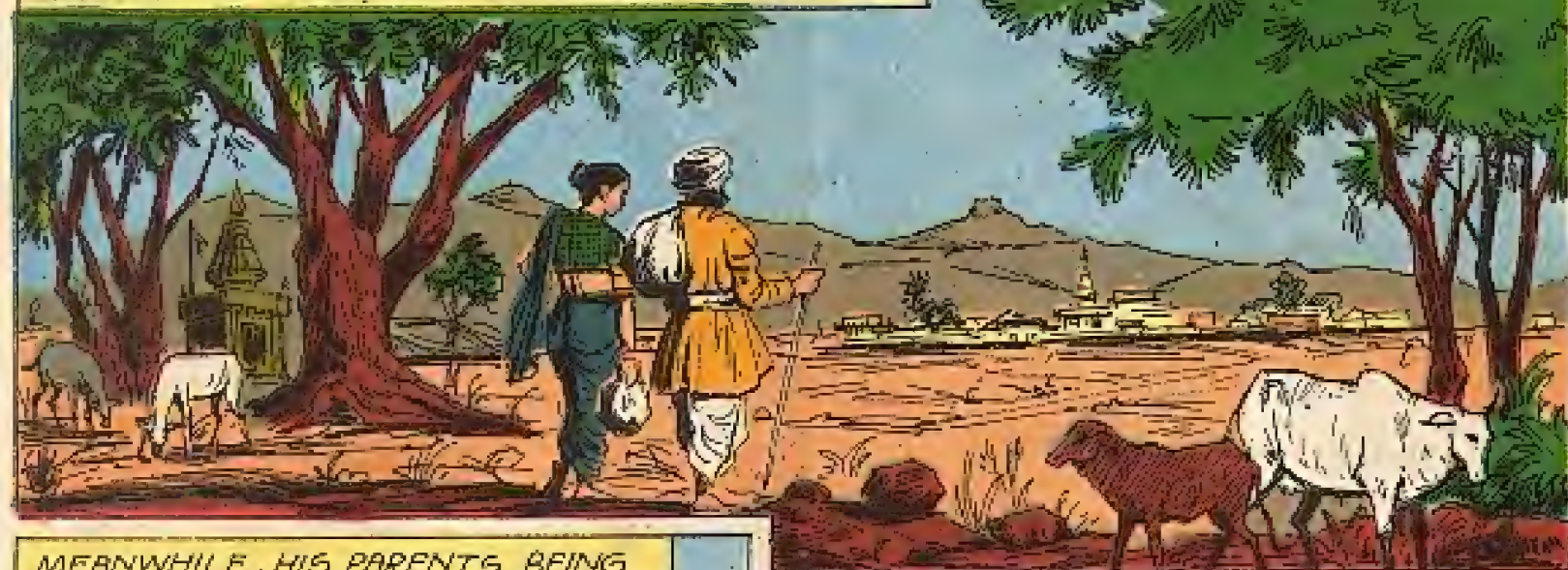
PUNDALIK COULD HARDLY SPEAK, BUT WITH HIS GREAT YOGIC POWERS, THE SAGE CAME TO KNOW EVERYTHING.



WITH THE SAGE'S BLESSINGS, PUNDALIK HURRIED BACK TO HIS WIFE, WHO HAD JUST WOKEN UP FROM HER SLEEP.



HE WAS NO LONGER INTERESTED IN THE PILGRIMAGE.
HIS ONE AIM NOW WAS TO TRACE HIS PARENTS.



MEANWHILE, HIS PARENTS, BEING
OLD, HAD TRAVELLED VERY SLOWLY
AND HAD NOT YET REACHED KASHI.



SO PUNDALIK SOON CAUGHT UP WITH
THEM AND FELL AT THEIR FEET.

FORGIVE ME,
DEAR PARENTS,
FOR GIVING
YOU SO MUCH
TROUBLE.



GOD BLESS YOU, SON.
TODAY YOU HAVE MADE US
TRULY HAPPY. COME, LET
US GO TO KASHI, AND
OFFER OUR PRAYERS THERE.

A FEW DAYS LATER, THEY REACHED
KASHI. AFTER BATHING IN THE
SACRED WATERS OF THE GANGA...



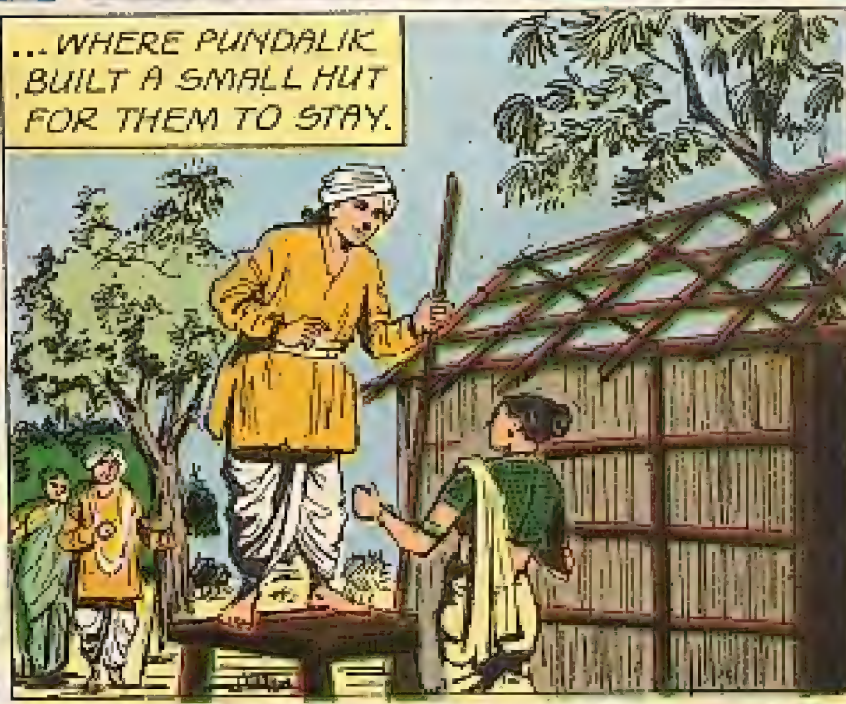
...THEY OFFERED
PRAYERS AT THE
TEMPLES THERE.



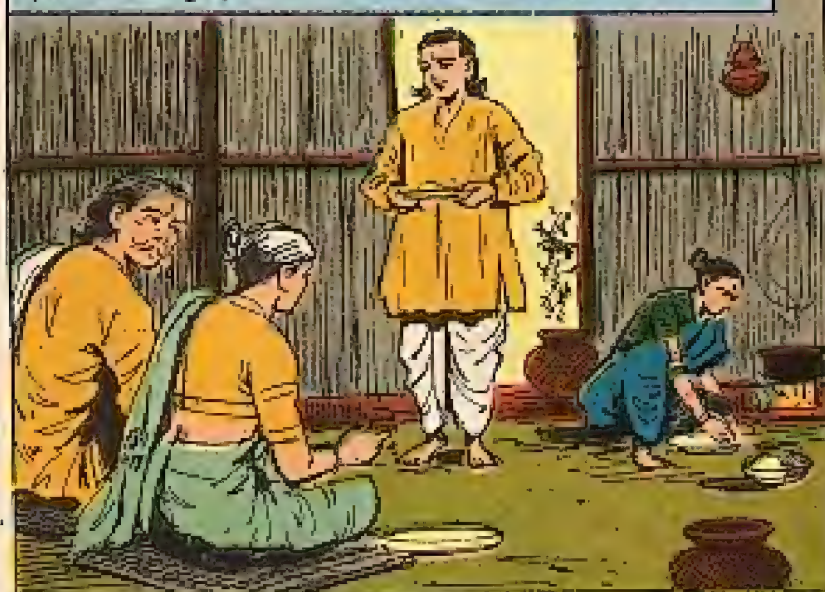
THEN THEY TRAVELLED
SOUTH TO PANDHARPUR...



...WHERE PUNDALIK
BUILT A SMALL HUT
FOR THEM TO STAY.



HE SERVED HIS PARENTS WITH SINGLE-
MINDED DEVOTION AND RESPECT.



HE ALSO READ SOME HOLY BOOKS
DAILY, AND MEDITATED ON LORD
KRISHNA.



ONE AFTERNOON, AS PUNDALIK WAS BUSY PRESSING HIS FATHER'S FEET, HE HEARD SOMEONE CALL.

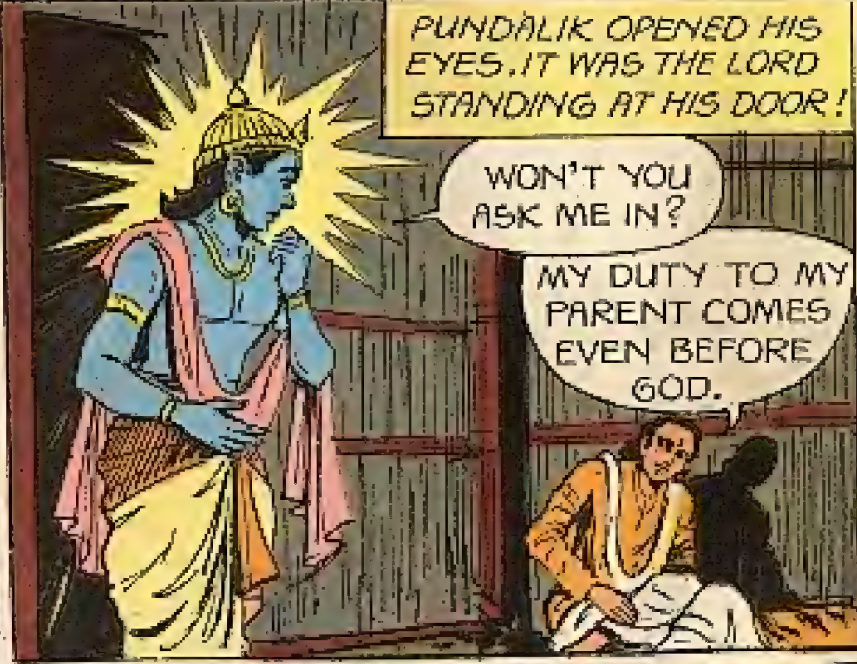
PUNDALIK!



PUNDALIK OPENED HIS EYES. IT WAS THE LORD STANDING AT HIS DOOR!

WON'T YOU ASK ME IN?

MY DUTY TO MY PARENT COMES EVEN BEFORE GOD.



I WILL NOT GET UP TO WELCOME YOU, LEST I DISTURB MY FATHER'S SLEEP. BUT COME IN, MY LORD.



I'M SORRY. I DON'T EVEN HAVE A DECENT PLACE FOR YOU TO SIT! PLEASE USE THIS BRICK, MY LORD.



KRISHNA STEPPED ON THE BRICK AND PLACING HIS HANDS ON HIS HIPS, SMILED.

PUNDALIK, I AM PLEASED BY YOUR DEVOTION TO YOUR PARENTS. ASK FOR ANY BOON AND I SHALL GRANT IT.

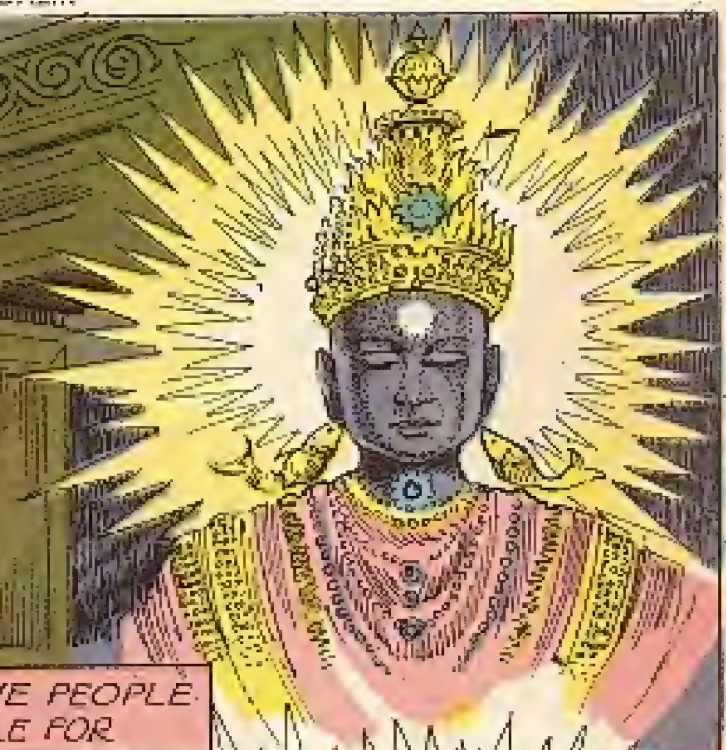
I HAVE SEEN YOU WITH MY OWN EYES. WHAT MORE CAN I ASK FOR? BUT IF YOU INSIST...



...NEVER, NEVER, LEAVE THIS PLACE MY LORD. REMAIN STANDING HERE FOREVER AND BLESS ALL THOSE WHO COME TO SEE YOU.



KRISHNA AGREED AND IN HIS PLACE STOOD A BEAUTIFUL IDOL THAT WAS HIS IMAGE.



PUNDALIK WAS VERY HAPPY. SO WERE ALL THE PEOPLE OF THE TOWN. THEY BUILT A BEAUTIFUL TEMPLE FOR VITHOBA*. THIS TEMPLE STANDS TO THIS DAY ON THE BANKS OF THE RIVER CHANDRABHAGA.

JAI HARI VITHAL! JAI JAI VITHAL!

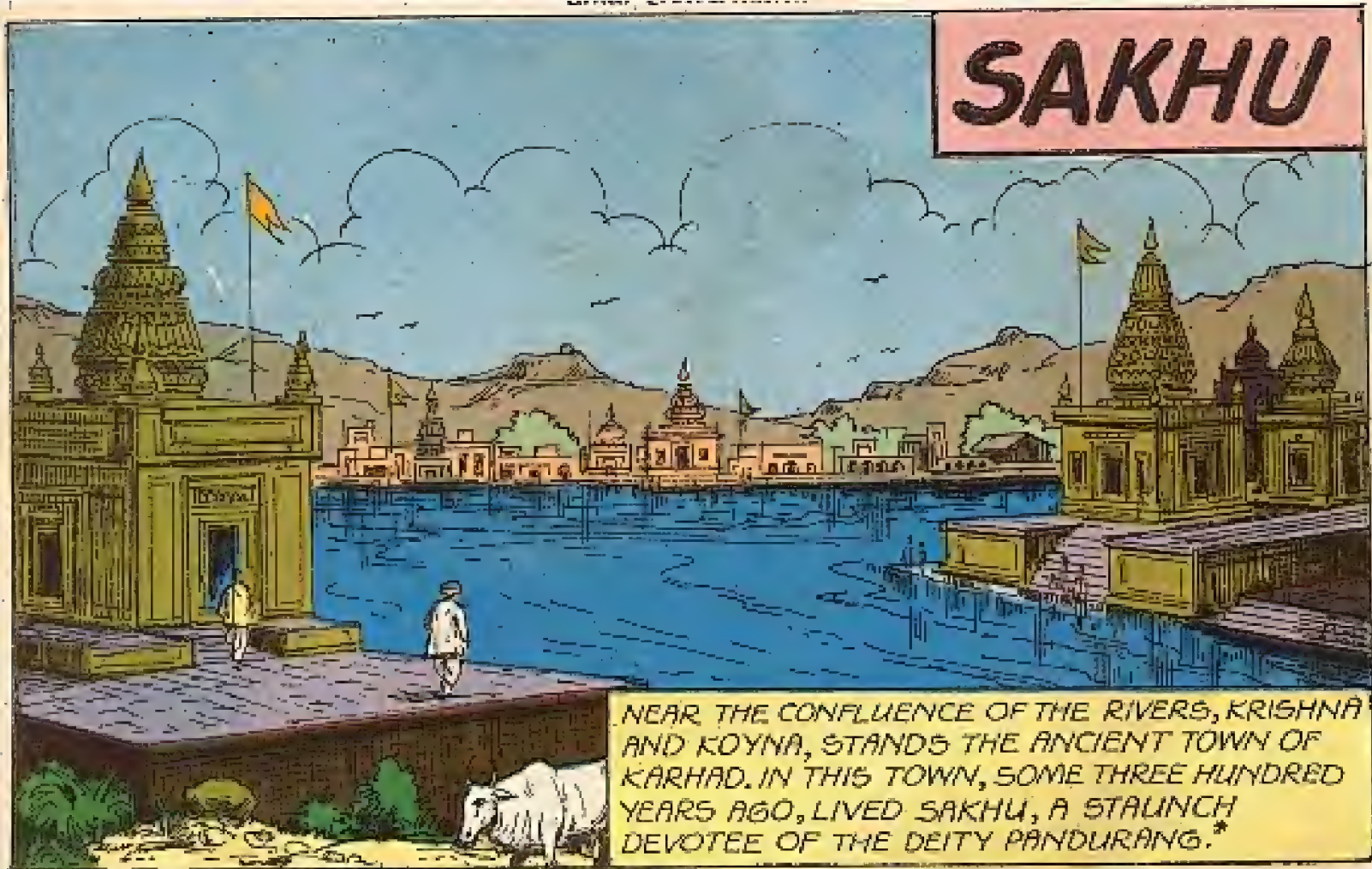


AND FROM THAT DAY ONWARDS, EVERYBODY LOOKED UPON PUNDALIK WITH GREAT RESPECT AND ADMIRATION, AS THE MAN WHO BROUGHT THE LORD TO PANDHARPUR.



*A CORRUPTION OF THE WORD VISHNUBA. THE SUFFIX 'BA' IS AN HONORIFIC. KRISHNA AS IS WELL KNOWN, IS AN INCARNATION OF VISHNU.

SAKHU



NEAR THE CONFLUENCE OF THE RIVERS, KRISHNA AND KOYNA, STANDS THE ANCIENT TOWN OF KARHAD. IN THIS TOWN, SOME THREE HUNDRED YEARS AGO, LIVED SAKHU, A STAUNCH DEVOTEE OF THE DEITY PANDURANG.*



EVEN WHILE DOING HER DAILY CHORES, SAKHU USED TO CHANT HIS NAME AND SING HIS GLORY.

JAI JAI VITHAL*
JAI HARI VITHAL!



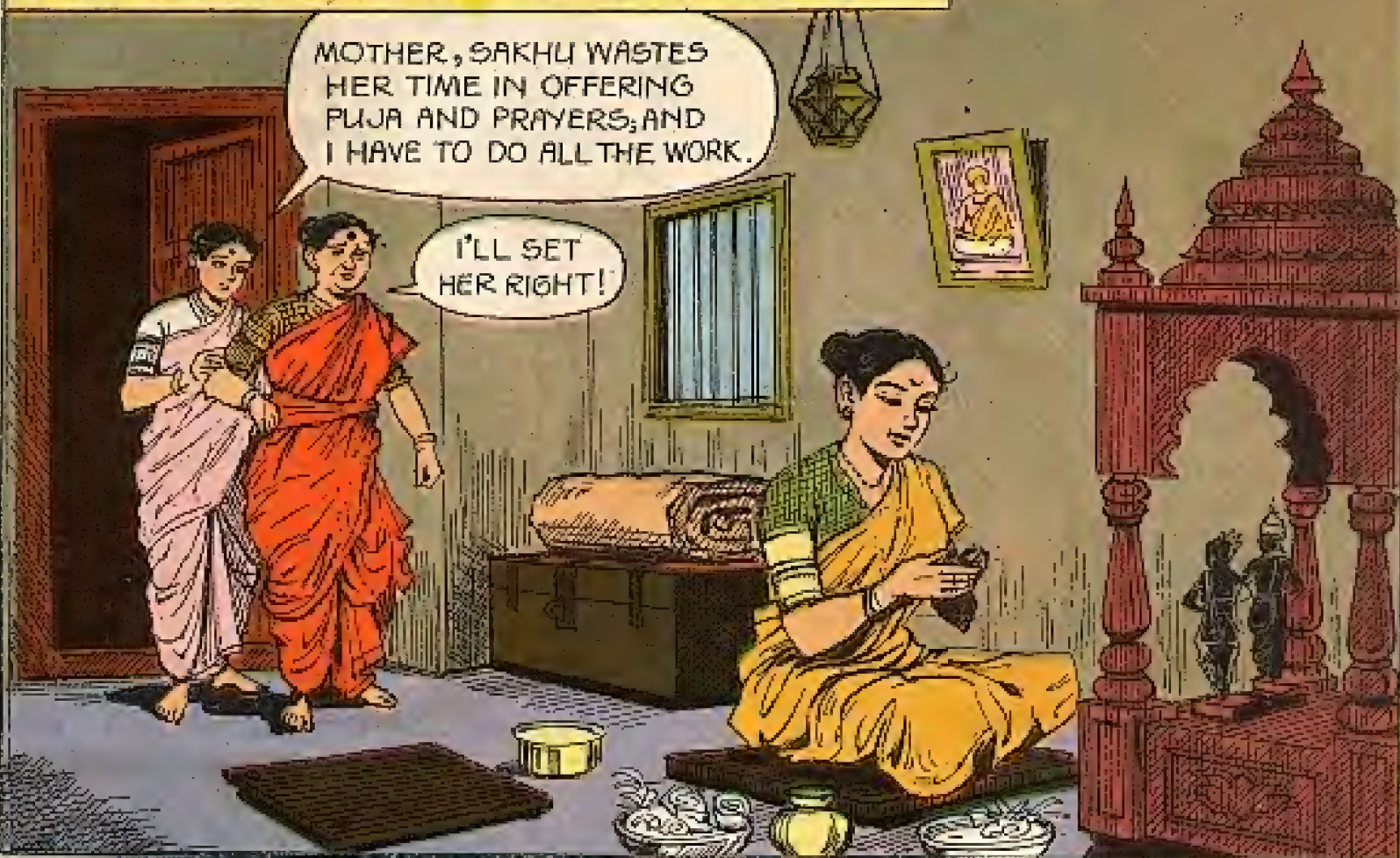
PANDURANG HARI*
VASUDEV HARI*

* NAME OF VISHNU.

HER SISTER-IN-LAW AND HER MOTHER-IN-LAW HAD NO FAITH
IN HER DEVOTION. SO, THOUGH SHE SAT BEFORE HIS IDOL,
ONLY AFTER SHE HAD FINISHED ALL OTHER WORK—

MOTHER, SAKHU WASTES
HER TIME IN OFFERING
PUJA AND PRAYERS, AND
I HAVE TO DO ALL THE WORK.

I'LL SET
HER RIGHT!



YOU FOOL! WHO DO YOU
THINK IS GOING TO
FINISH ALL THE WORK?
IS YOUR PANDURANG
GOING TO COOK
AND CLEAN
FOR YOU?

I WILL THROW HIM
OUT OF THIS
HOUSE, THE
NUISANCE!

MOTHER!
PLEASE...

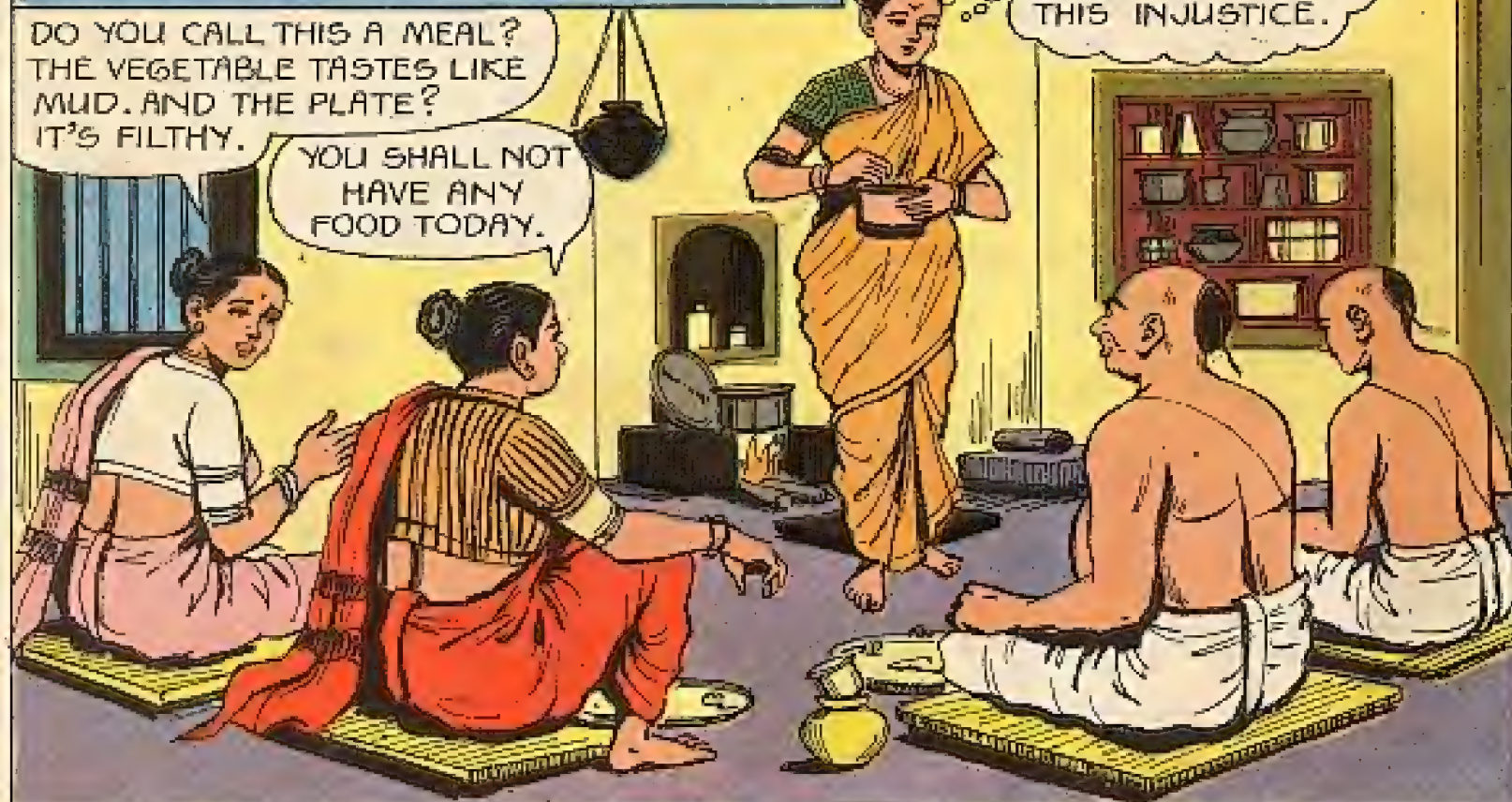


THEY CONSTANTLY NAGGED HER AND EVEN INVENTED FAULTS WHERE THERE WERE NONE.

DO YOU CALL THIS A MEAL? THE VEGETABLE TASTES LIKE MUD. AND THE PLATE? IT'S FILTHY.

YOU SHALL NOT HAVE ANY FOOD TODAY.

LORD, GIVE ME THE STRENGTH TO BEAR THIS INJUSTICE.



ONCE, WHEN SAKHU WAS FETCHING WATER FROM THE RIVER, A DINDI* ON ITS WAY TO PANDHARPUR PASSED BY.

VITHAL! VITHAL!

JAI JAI VITHAL!
JAI HARI VITHAL!

PANDURANG HARI!
VASUDEV HARI!

AH, MY HEART
ACHES TO
JOIN THEM.



* A GROUP OF PILGRIMS, SINGING AND DANCING ON A PILGRIMAGE.

MEANWHILE, THE NEIGHBOUR WENT TO HER MOTHER-IN-LAW.

SAKHU IS ON HER WAY TO PANDHARPUR WITH A DINDI.

HOW DARE SHE GO WITHOUT MY PERMISSION!

THE MOTHER-IN-LAW POUNCED ON SAKHU'S HUSBAND.

WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR, YOU GOOD-FOR-NOTHING! GO AND BRING HER BACK.

THE SON DID AS HE WAS TOLD.

ENOUGH OF YOUR PANDURANG, YOU FOOLISH WOMAN.

JAI JAI VITHAL!

POOR GIRL!

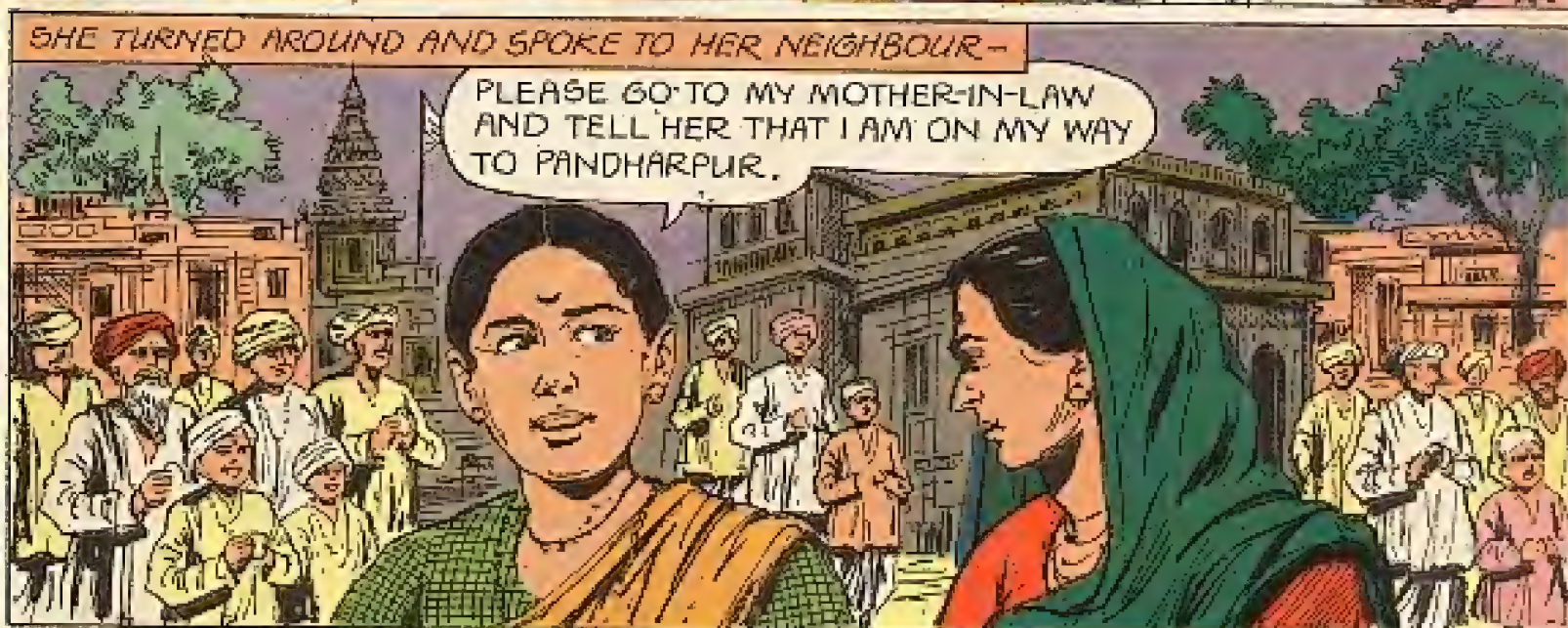
SAKHU DECIDED TO GIVE IN TO THE DEEP YEARNING IN HER HEART.

I SHALL GO WITH THEM.



SHE TURNED AROUND AND SPOKE TO HER NEIGHBOUR—

PLEASE GO TO MY MOTHER-IN-LAW AND TELL HER THAT I AM ON MY WAY TO PANDHARPUR.

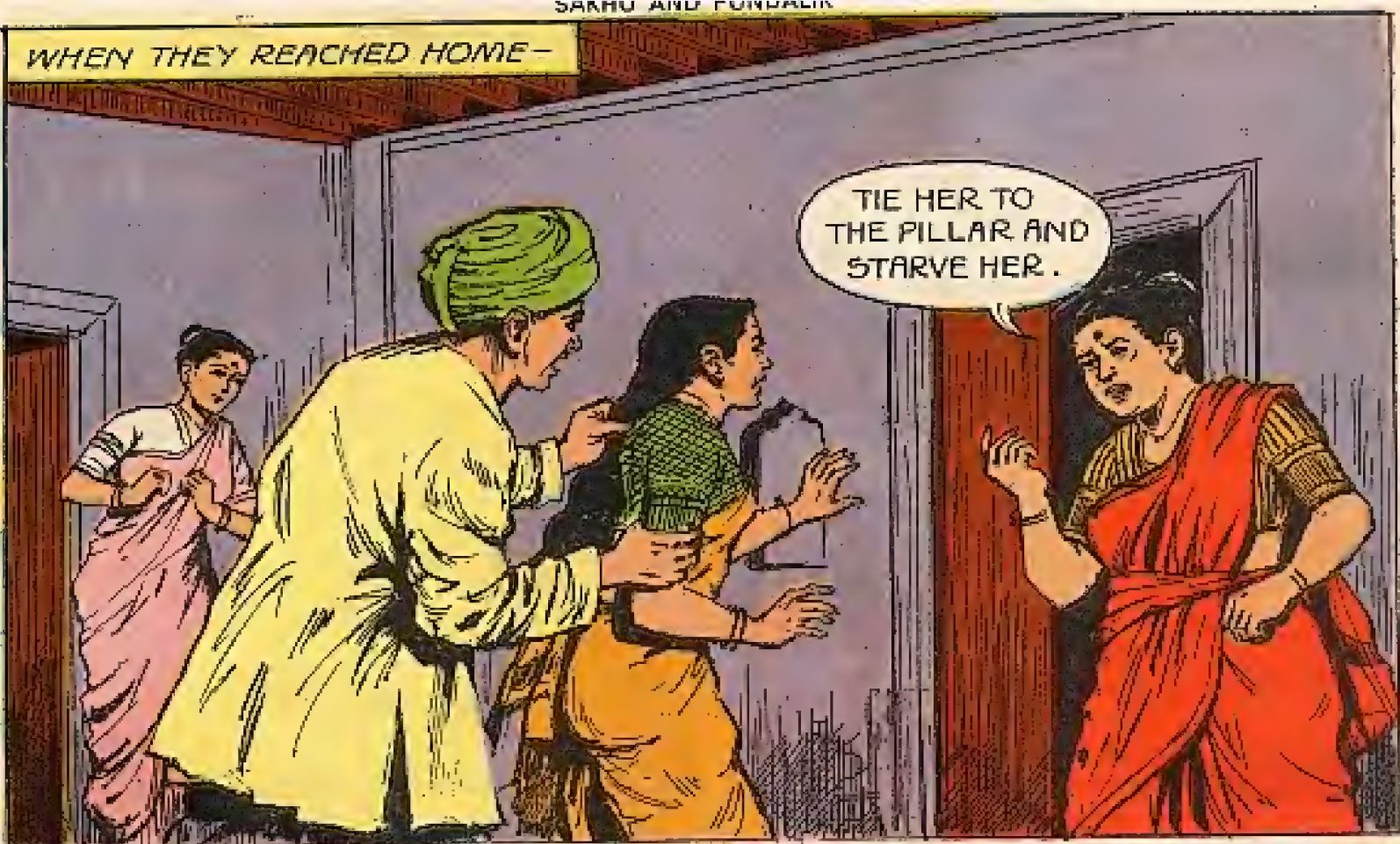


AND SHE JOINED THE DINDI.

NOW I'LL SEE MY LORD.



WHEN THEY REACHED HOME -



FOR DAYS TOGETHER SAKHU WAS NOT GIVEN ANYTHING TO EAT AND SHE WAS FAMISHED.



SUDDENLY—

NO! CAN IT BE TRUE?
I CAN SEE HIM BEFORE
MY EYES EVEN NOW!

AS SHE CLOSED HER EYES, SHE SAW
PANDURANG AND RUKMINI IN HER
MIND'S EYE.

LORD, IF I CAN COME
TO YOU BUT ONCE,
I'LL DIE PEACE-
FULLY.

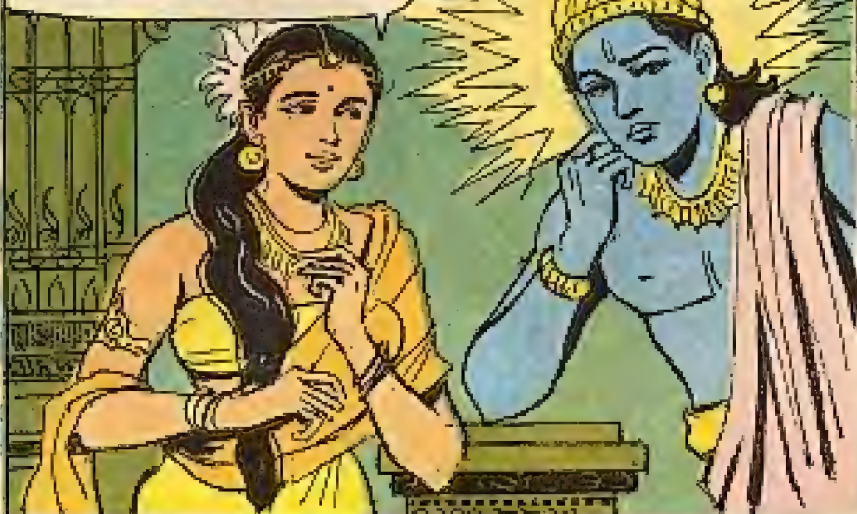
MEANWHILE, MILLIONS OF DEVOTEES HAD GATHERED IN
PANDHARPUR. THE TOWN WAS FILLED WITH THE CHANTING
AND DANCING OF THE DEVOTEES, INCLUDING THOSE FROM
KARHAD.

POOR SAKHU, SHE
MUST BE FEELING
MISERABLE.

MAY PANDURANG
RELEASE HER FROM
HER PLIGHT.

INSIDE THE TEMPLE, PANDURANG BECAME RESTLESS. RUKMINI, HIS CONSORT, QUESTIONED HIM.

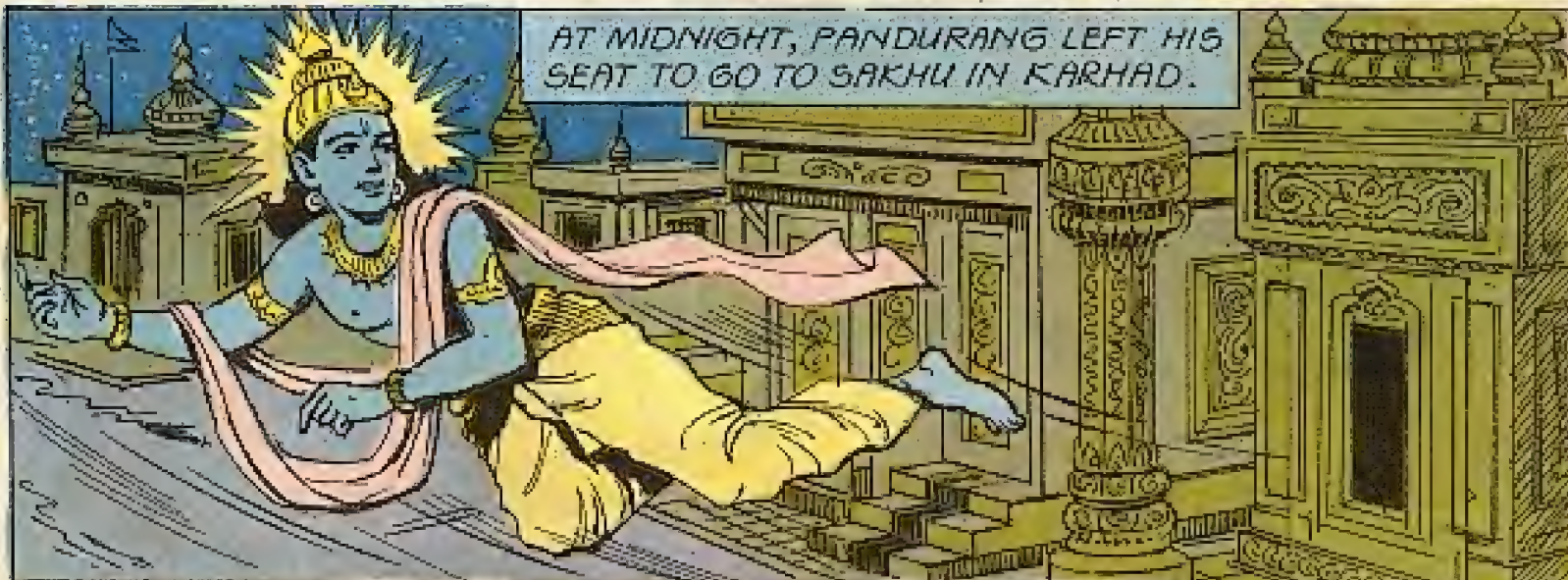
WHAT IS WORRYING YOU, MY LORD?



IT IS SAKHU. I MUST RUSH TO HER HELP. BUT MY OUTWARD FORM WILL REMAIN HERE.



AT MIDNIGHT, PANDURANG LEFT HIS SEAT TO GO TO SAKHU IN KARHAD.

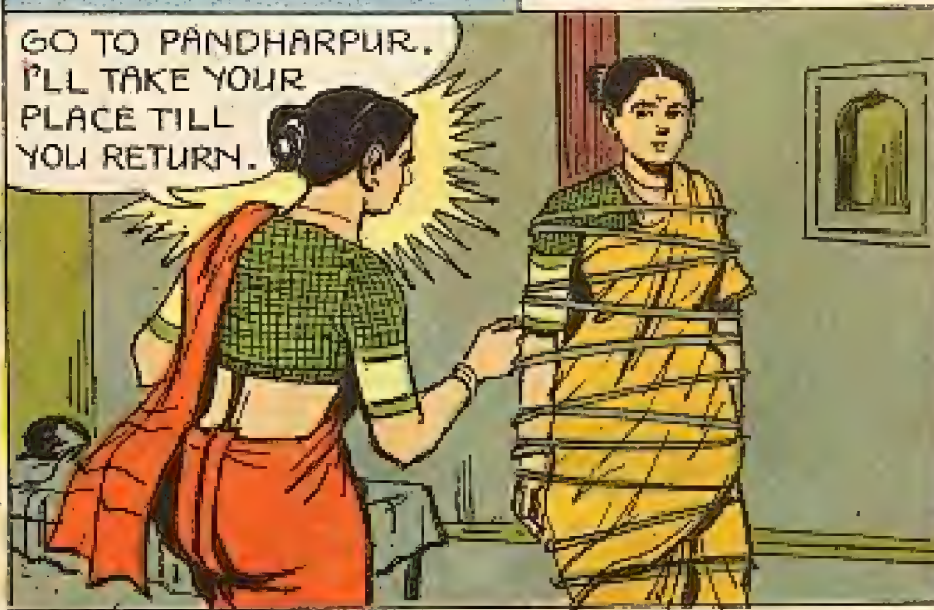


I'LL TAKE HER PLACE AND STAY IN HER HOUSE.



PANDURANG TOOK THE FORM OF A WOMAN AND STOOD BEFORE SAKHU.

GO TO PANDHARPUR. I'LL TAKE YOUR PLACE TILL YOU RETURN.



AH, MY FRIEND, I CANNOT
THANK YOU ENOUGH.

AFTER SAKHU WENT OUT, PANDURANG
ONCE AGAIN CHANGED HIS FORM -
THIS TIME, TO LOOK LIKE SAKHU.

GO AND JOIN
THE DEVOTEES
AT PANDHARPUR.

SAKHU JOYFULLY SET OUT.

I WONDER WHO THE GOOD
WOMAN WAS. BECAUSE OF
HER, AT LAST I WILL BE
ABLE TO SEE PANDURANG
WITH MY OWN EYES.

MEANWHILE, AT HOME, FOR SOME REASON SAKHU'S
HUSBAND WAS SUDDENLY FILLED WITH COMPASSION.

WE HAVE TREATED
YOU BADLY. WILL
YOU FORGIVE US?

I AM HAPPY
YOU HAVE
COME TO ME.

PANDURANG, POSING AS SAKHU, SERVED HER HUSBAND AND HIS PARENTS.

IS MY BATH READY?

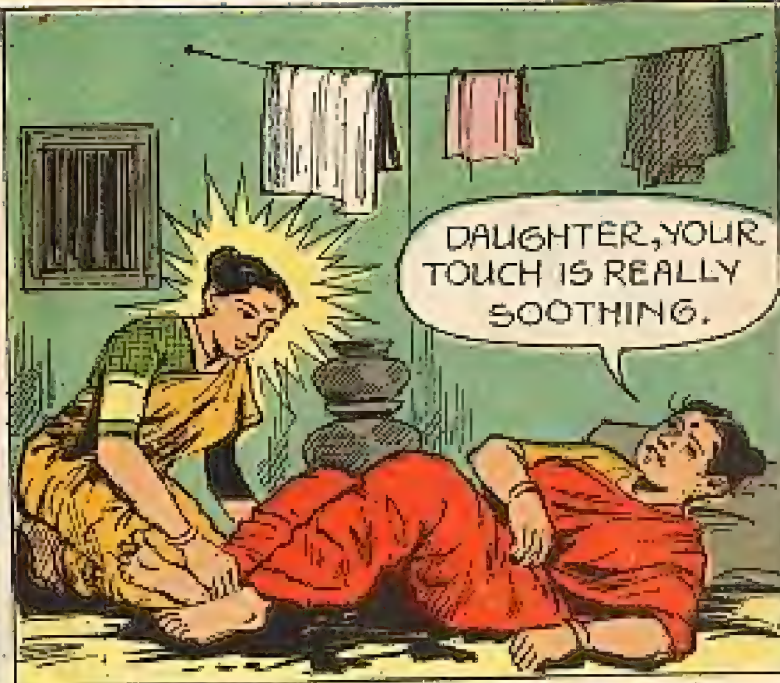
IT IS. YOU'LL ENJOY THE HOT WATER.



SHE MAKES SUCH A NEAT BED.

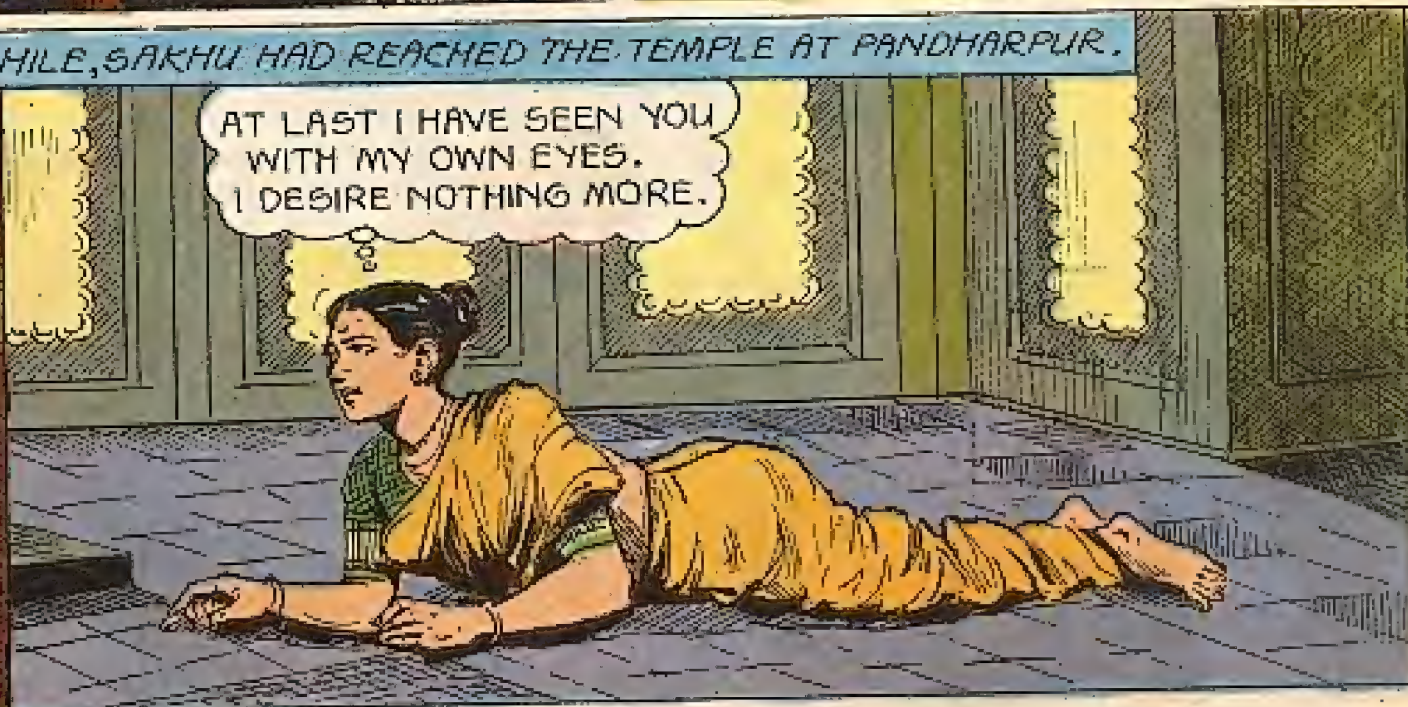


DAUGHTER, YOUR TOUCH IS REALLY SOOTHING.



MEANWHILE, SAKHU HAD REACHED THE TEMPLE AT PANDHARPUR.

AT LAST I HAVE SEEN YOU WITH MY OWN EYES. I DESIRE NOTHING MORE.





BEING A GOOD MAN HE ARRANGED FOR HER CREMATION AND LAST RITES. SHE WAS CREMATED ON THE SANDY BANKS OF CHANDRABHAGA.



MEANWHILE, IN THE TEMPLE, RUKMINI WAS WORRIED.



SO RUKMINI BROUGHT SAKHU BACK TO LIFE.



SAKHU JOINED THE PILGRIMS ON THEIR RETURN JOURNEY TO KARHAD.



NEAR THE BANK OF THE KOYNA SHE SAW THE WOMAN WHO HAD SET HER FREE.

I HAD BROUGHT THIS WATER POT FROM YOUR HOME. PLEASE TAKE IT BACK WITH YOU.



WHO COULD SHE BE?



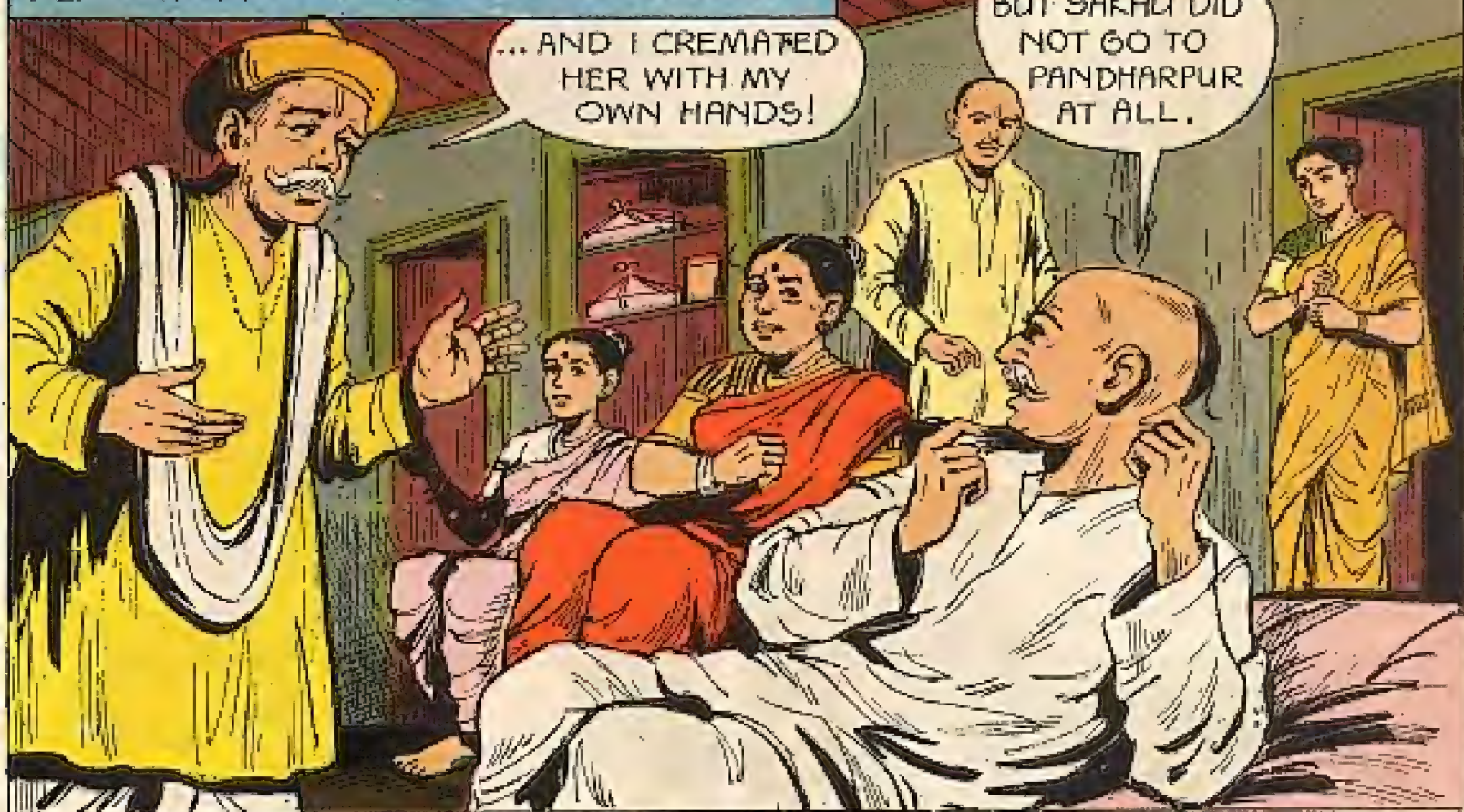
AS SAKHU WAS ABOUT TO ENTER HER HOME, THE GOOD BRAHMAN WHO HAD CREMATED HER SAW HER AND WAS SHOCKED.

HOW COULD THIS BE? IS SHE REALLY SAKHU?



* BECAUSE, PANDURANG HAD AGAIN CHANGED HIS FORM.

THE GOOD BRAHMAN FOLLOWED HER INTO THE HOUSE AND TOLD THE FAMILY THE WHOLE STORY OF SAKHU'S VISIT TO PANDHARPUR — HER DEATH AT THE FEET OF PANDURANG.



... AND I CREMATED HER WITH MY OWN HANDS!

BUT SAKHU DID NOT GO TO PANDHARPUR AT ALL.

SAKHU TOLD THEM THAT SHE HAD GONE. THEN —

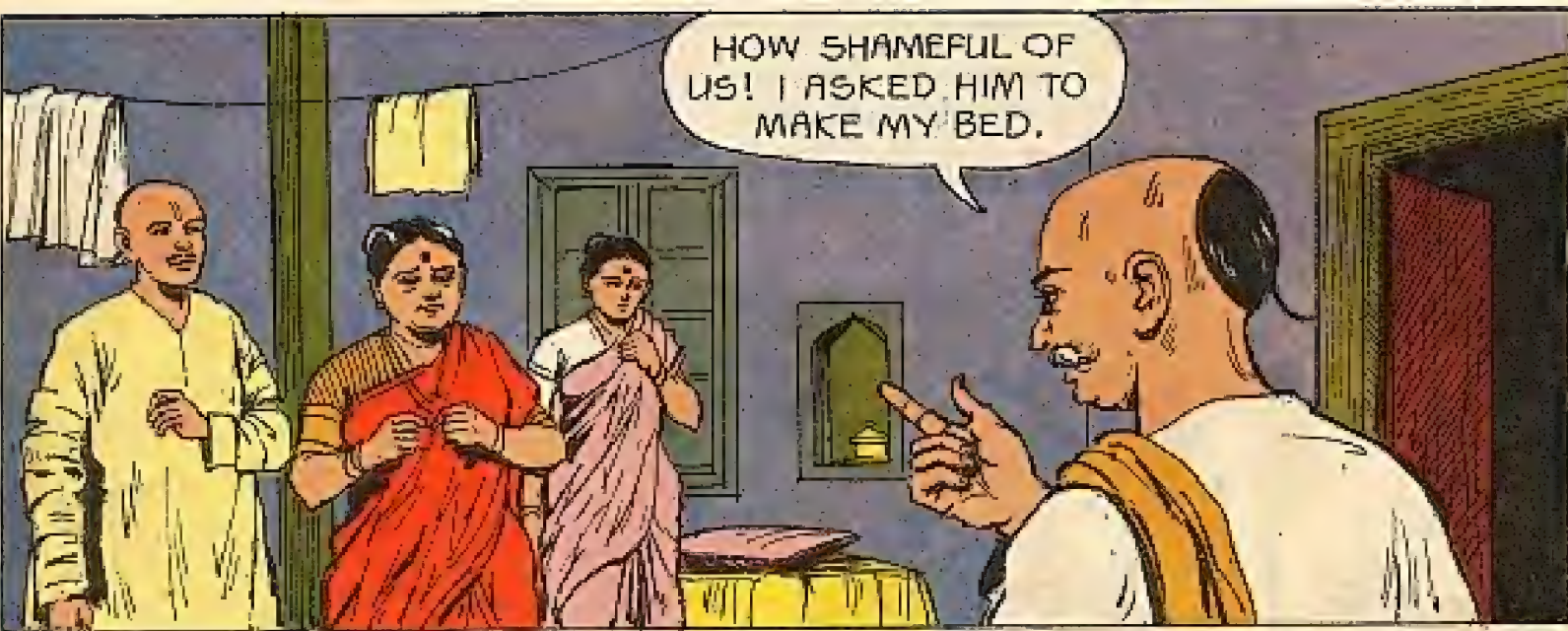


WHY, IT MUST HAVE BEEN HIM. MY OWN PANDURANG, WHO CAME TO ME AND TOOK MY PLACE WHEN I WENT!

SO IT WAS ALL HIS DOING!

SUCH ARE THE WAYS OF THE LORD.

HOW SHAMEFUL OF US! I ASKED HIM TO MAKE MY BED.



ALAS! I ASKED HIM TO PRESS MY FEET. SHAME ON ME. I'LL NEVER BE FORGIVEN.



THE FOOL THAT I WAS! I ASKED HIM TO PREPARE MY BATH.

AND I ASKED HIM TO WASH MY HAIR.



DO NOT GRIEVE. HE IS MERCIFUL. HE WILL FORGIVE ALL.

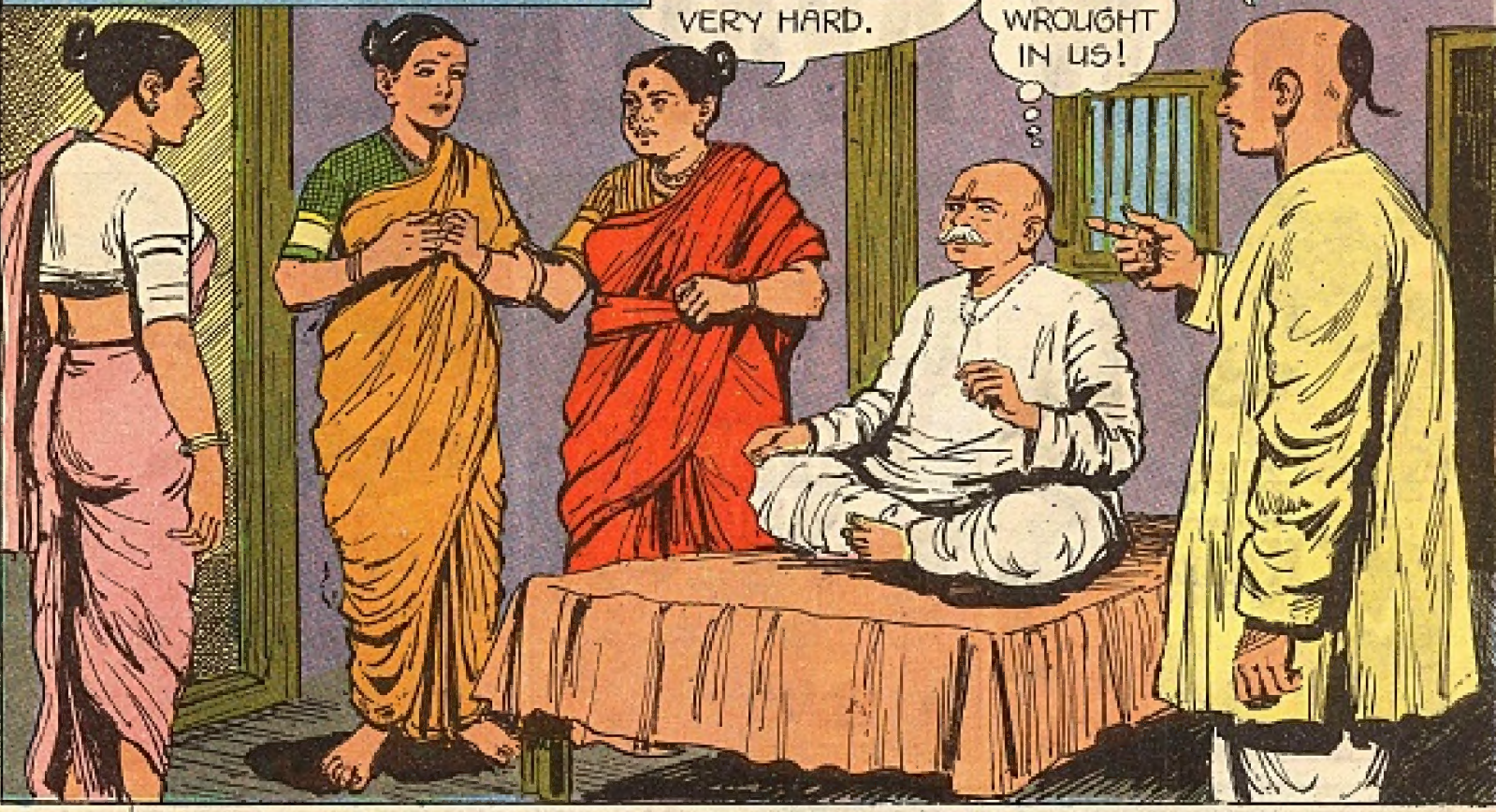


AFTER THAT, SAKHU WAS TREATED VERY RESPECTFULLY AND AFFECTION-
ATELY BY HER HUSBAND'S FAMILY.

DAUGHTER, REST
FOR A WHILE.
YOU HAVE WORKED
VERY HARD.

WHAT A
CHANGE
SHE HAS
WROUGHT
IN US!

WE ARE
PROUD OF YOU.

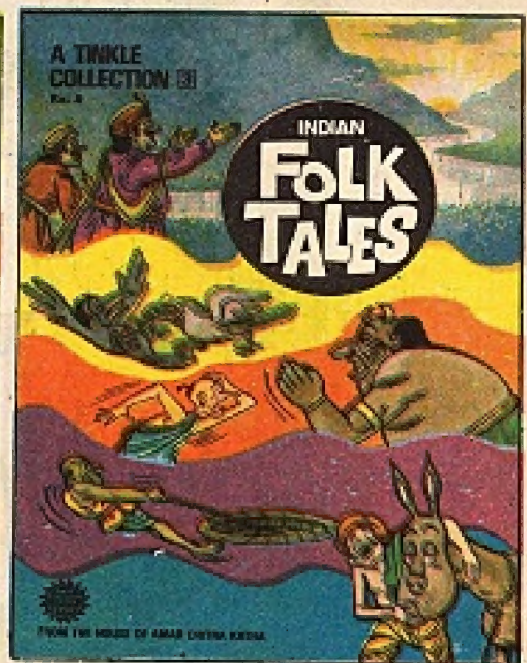
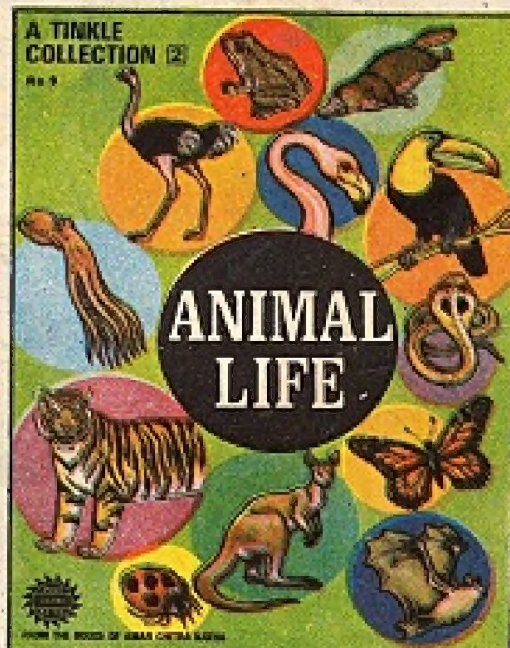
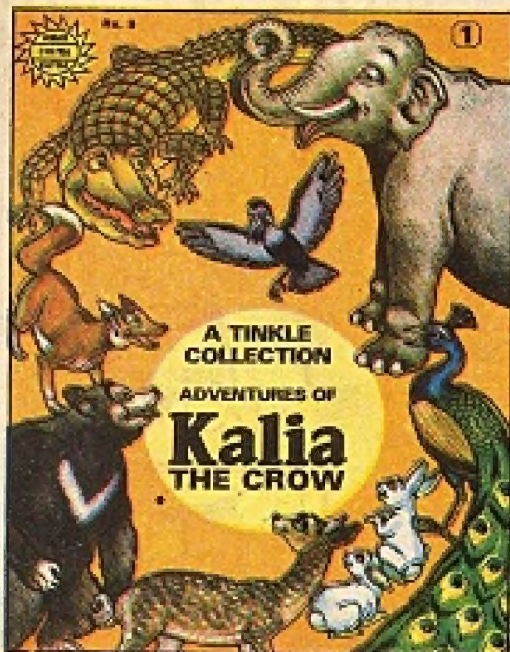


THEY TOO BECAME GREAT DEVOTEES OF PANDURANG
AND OFTEN WENT TO HIS TEMPLE AT PANDHARPUR.

JAI VITHAL, JAI HARI VITHAL.



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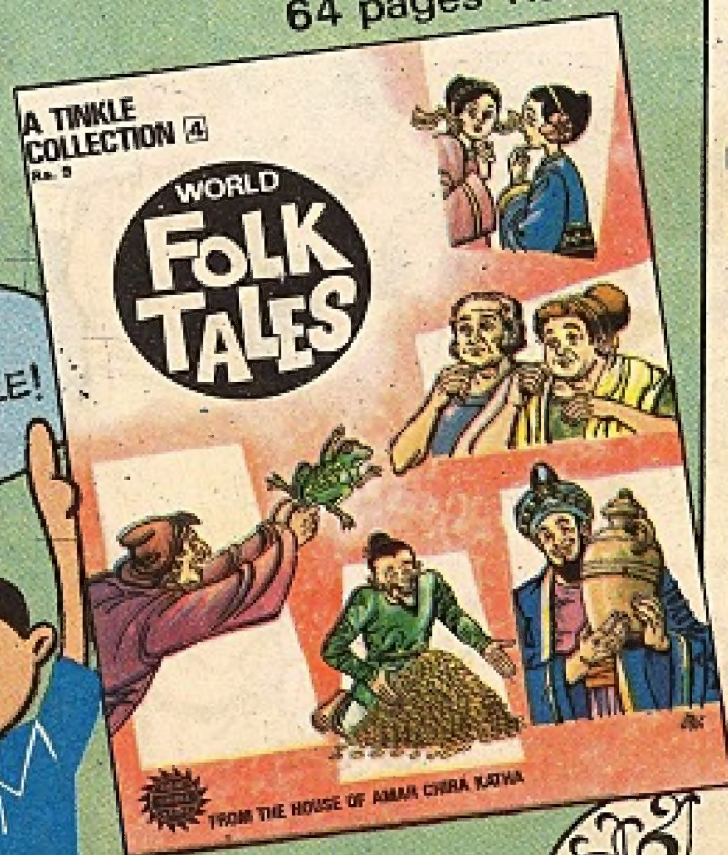
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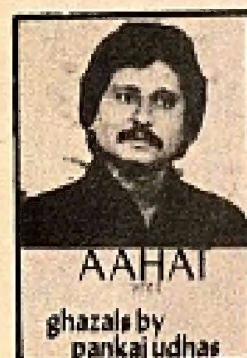


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